

# ROUTING AND TRANSMITTAL SLIP

Date

March 23, 1979

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## REMARKS

The Statement was accepted by the Committee  
 but Mr. White made no oral statements.

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# U.S. EPA REGION IV

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STATEMENT OF  
JOHN C. WHITE, REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION IV, ATLANTA, GEORGIA  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS  
COMMITTEE ON INTERSTATE AND FOREIGN COMMERCE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 22, 1979

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to outline in some detail EPA's experiences with hazardous waste in the Louisville, Kentucky area.

First, let me locate for you the three hazardous waste dumping sites which I will be discussing in this testimony. Site number one is property owned by Mr. and Mrs. William Distler located near West Point, Kentucky, in Jefferson County, some 20 miles south of the City of Louisville. This site, subsequently, will be referred to as the Farm. It has also been referred to as the Stump Gap Creek site.

A second site is an abandoned brickyard on Highway 31 West, about one mile from West Point, Kentucky. The brickyard is in Hardin County.

The third site, commonly known as, "The Valley of the Drums," is in Bullitt County, approximately five miles north of Shepherdsville, Kentucky, on State Highway 1020. It is owned by the widow of A. L. Taylor.

Briefly, let me take you back to the Spring of 1977 when chemical wastes were dumped into the City of Louisville sewer system. The chemicals were identified as hexachlorocyclopentadiene (hexa) and octachlorocyclopentene (octa). Hexa and octa are constituents of pesticides such as Mirex and Kepone.

The chemicals found their way to the Morris-Forman Wastewater Treatment Plant. A number of plant workers became ill and the plant itself was rendered inoperable. This is a story in itself. But I'll sum it up by saying that some sewer lines are still contaminated and an estimated \$1.5 million dollars has been spend thus far on the investigation and cleanup.

Immediately following the dumping incident and as a part of the investigation, EPA and representatives of the Kentucky Department for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, sampled 55-gallon drums at the Donald Distler home site. Hexa was found in the drums. The home site was sampled on both April 4, and 15, 1977.

On April 15, the Brickyard site was visited by EPA, the FBI, and State officials. Drums were sampled and again hexa was found.

The Farm property location was first investigated on April 16th. Samples were taken from buried drums and from those lying on the ground. Some samples were also taken from stream sediment adjacent to or on the property. Analyses revealed the presence of many chemical compounds.

From May 1977 until December 1978 no further action was taken pending disposition of an indictment stemming from the sewer dumping incident. All data and reports were held by the Department of Justice.

In December 1978, Donald E. Distler, son of the William Distler's and operator of a waste disposal firm, was found guilty by a Federal Judge of criminally discharging chemicals into the Louisville sewer system.

Ironically, it was at this time in late December - that rising flood waters caused drums on the 12-acre Farm property to be carried into nearby Stump Gap Creek.

On January 4, 1979, my representatives joined State officials in Louisville and proceeded to the farm site. Drums were found lodged in trees, floating on the waters of Stump Gap Creek, and in fields adjacent to the creek.

There were about 600 drums containing industrial wastes spread over a one square mile area. Most were damaged and some had ruptured, spilling their contents into the creek.

We estimated cleanup cost would total \$100,000. This included a thirteen man crew in full protective clothing with suitable equipment to transfer liquid wastes to sound containers. The \$100,000 figure did not include disposal costs. The estimates were forwarded to the State Agency and to EPA headquarters.

Governor Julian Carroll called the situation an "urgent environmental emergency" and called for Federal financial assistance on January 5th.

The funds were obtained, a contract for the cleanup was let, and a command post was set up January 6th at a motel in Sheperdsville, Kentucky. Jack Stonebraker of my staff served as on-scene-coordinator and headed a seven man team at the command post. Personnel included Coast Guard and Gulf Strike Team members and a representative of the contractor. Later, assistance was sought, and obtained, from the U.S. Army at Ft. Knox, Kentucky.

Altogether, about 830 drums containing hazardous substances were recovered, transported to higher ground, and transferred to reconditioned drums.

The waste transfer operation was concluded January 15th. The emergency situation was ended, the \$100,000 was exhausted, and there was no money left for transporting and disposing of the wastes. On the highest ground in the area, dikes were constructed around the reconditioned drums. Drums containing sludge and contaminated soil were diked, covered with plastic, and topped with one foot of soil.

Meanwhile, Army personnel were surveying the Stump Gap Creek area with mine detectors. Two areas, measuring about 20 by 40 feet were believed to contain drums in underground pits. Digging later confirmed their presence.

As the emergency recovery operation progressed, the two other sites mentioned at the opening of these remarks were receiving more of our attention. At the abandoned brickyard, leased by Donald Distler, we found between 3,000 and 6,000 drums of industrial wastes.

An early January inspection showed drums stored all over the property - on the roof of a building, in brick kilns, and near the main line tracks of the L&N Railroad. About 200 drums were found about 50 yards from a stream. Some had been punctured by shots from high-powered rifles. Drainage from the area flowed on both sides of the railroad tracks and entered an unnamed tributary to the Ohio River. A well on the west side of the property had been capped recently with cement. Vegetation around the well was dead. Reportedly, some waste had been pumped into the well. It is our opinion that the Brickyard drums pose a threat to the stream and the environment generally.

This brings us to the Taylor property known as the Valley of the Drums. This site was brought to our attention while we were working on the farmsite. The 23-acre site lies in a valley between the L&N Railroad's golf course and the Jefferson County Memorial Park.

State officials told us Mr. Taylor operated at the site for at least ten years. He was never issued a permit to handle hazardous waste.

The initial estimate of drums on this property ranged from 20,000 to 100,000 drums of oil and hazardous substances aboveground and an unknown quantity of drums and liquid waste underground. It is believed that the disposal operation by the owner consisted of pouring industrial waste into pits and trenches and covering it with soil. Elsewhere, drums of hazardous waste were stacked five and six high.

Drums are swollen by internal pressure and burst frequently. Nearby property owners own deep wells - and shallow wells - which are not used at the present time because of poor quality water. In the summer, vapors from drums have allegedly caused persons nearby to experience headaches and nausea.

A potential environmental crisis most certainly exists in the Valley of the Drums.

On January 17 we and State agency personnel drew up a plan of action to deal with the situation. While our attorneys researched records of the site, plans were made for a reconnaissance of groundwater users in the immediate area, and plans for a hydrogeologic assessment were developed.

During recent weeks we have undertaken an extensive sampling and analysis program at the Valley site.

Samples taken earlier from drums at the Farm site revealed the presence of a variety of materials. Those compounds present in the highest concentrations are commonly used as solvents for paints and resins. Chemicals contained in the drums include xylene, toluene, and naphthalene.

Metals found in the most significant concentrations were lead, chromium, zinc, copper, cadmium, and titanium.



On Friday, March 2, 1979, State personnel advised EPA that the Valley was leaking - that oil and other potentially hazardous material were spilling into Wilson Creek. Efforts were directed at controlling the runoff and eliminating the pollution of Wilson Creek. After obtaining the property owners permission, we constructed trenches and catch basins to collect the surface runoff and intercept the subsurface lateral migration of the liquids. A unique water treatment system was constructed to aerate the collected water and filter it through activated carbon. Preliminary results indicate a 99 percent reduction of organic chemicals through the treatment system. I emphasize that this is only a temporary, stop-gap measure and does not solve the disposal problem at the Valley.

We are now in the process of working with the State to describe the magnitude of the problem. Drilling rigs are on the scene now collecting soil samples to determine the depth and magnitude and kind of contamination. Stream and well sampling and analyses are in progress. No drums have been sampled to date by EPA because of the need to first determine if environmental damage exists. In data just released earlier this week, we did find low levels of PCB in the stream sediments of Wilson Creek, although none were found in the water. None of the chemicals (hexa, octa) connected with the Louisville Morris Forman problem were detected. The majority of volatile organic compounds present in greater than 10-ug/l concentration are chemicals commonly used as solvents in such things as paints, resins, varnishes, lacquer, and dry cleaning, also degreasers and paint removers. Many of the extractable compounds are commonly associated with the manufacture of paint-related products.

State authorities this week advised against eating fish taken from the affected streams. PCB's accumulate in fish tissue and are passed on in the food chain.

No public drinking water supplies have shown signs of contamination. Investigations of private wells are continuing.

This account, I hope, has given you some idea of the magnitude and seriousness of the problem and EPA's efforts to deal with it. If you wish, I can provide much more detailed information. Thank you.